

# MAKE YOUR OWN COMEBACK

*This is your life. Do the most you can with it.*

A letter that I will never forget arrived in the mail one day. Every time I think about it, my eyes well up with tears. The letter was written by a woman who had been confined to a wheelchair for years due to a crippling muscle disease. She had read about my comeback from retirement, and it inspired her to such a level that she began to see new possibilities for herself. Something inside her burst open, gathered strength, and gushed out in the form of desire: desire to break free and walk again, desire to play her favorite sport—tennis—once again. Inspired, she directed the full force of her energy to make her own comeback. She got out of her wheelchair and fulfilled her desires.

What about you? Do you need to make a comeback—perhaps from poor health, an out-of-shape body, a bad attitude, or shattered self-confidence? I bring up this story to tell you that all things are possible when you have the desire to change and approach it with a self-loving attitude. You can make your own comeback, too.

## **MAKE THE CHOICE**

From the day we are born, most of us bounce into this world healthy. Then something goes wrong. That “something” is us. We begin to habitually make poor health

choices. We eat mass-produced junk food that is toxic to our bodies. We veg out on the couch, even though our bodies were designed to move. We gain weight that our bodies were never intended to lug around. We smoke, drink too much alcohol, or do drugs, taking in poisons that irreparably damage the integrity of our cells.

As humans living in industrialized countries today, we're far off the mark from the lifestyle that we were meant to live. The outermost sign of this is our physical shape: pounds and pounds of fat that mar the natural beauty of the human form, gravely interfere with our normal activities, lessen our quality of life, hurt our financial situations, and, of course, shorten our life spans.

The way I see it, people are just not meant to be overweight. To anyone who's overweight and claims to be happy, I'd say, "What planet are you living on? Who are you trying to convince—me or yourself?"

On planet Earth, America is the fattest of all nations; the number of obese people is staggering, despite all the low-fat foods, low-carb products, diet drinks, and artificial sweeteners we consume. (In fact, you have to search high and low to find full-fat yogurt, which is what I like.) With all these diet foods around, it's hard to figure why so many people are overweight.

By contrast, in Europe, you would be hard-pressed to find severely overweight people, and in Africa, where I've traveled and lived, you seldom see people with weight problems. They work hard just to eke out a living and put food on the table, so there's little opportunity to overindulge.

In many respects, they're like our ancestors, the early hunters and gatherers who hunted wild game and collected plant foods to eat. During times of plenty, their bodies were designed to store food as fat to be used as fuel during periods of famine. As their descendants, we inherited this ability to store fat. However, there are no famines in America these days, so the fat we store is not burned but continues to accrue through the years. We no longer hunt and collect as our forebears did. Instead, we pop food in the microwave or get it at the drive-thru, then just collect it in our bellies.

From what I understand, the natural diet of our ancestors served them well. Archaeological records reveal that they lived relatively free of heart disease, cancer, hypertension, diabetes, osteoporosis, and other diseases that are killing us off today. Many nutritionists and scientists feel that we're genetically programmed to thrive on a diet of natural foods—fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, grains, and low-fat meats—just as our ancestors did. I believe them. It just makes sense, this evolutionary inheritance that resides in us. But the problem is that we pollute our bodies with cheeseburgers, sodas, potato chips, and candy bars. It's no wonder our bodies break down and get so sick: We're feeding them foods they register as poisons.

You've probably read the same statistics I have: In the United States alone, poor diets and physical inactivity account for more than 400,000 deaths each year. Smoking kills approximately 440,000 people yearly. Wouldn't you say we're choosing a suicidal lifestyle?

By choosing differently, taking better care of yourself and making healthy choices, you in-

crease your odds of preventing, and even reversing, life-threatening illnesses. And who knows? You may live to be 100 or even more, still vital, still in robust health. I don't know about you, but I intend to die at a very *healthy* old age.

If you start following just some of the tips and guidelines here, at the very least, you'll start looking and feeling better right away. If you do them all, there's no telling how much better you will feel and look, and there's no telling how much better and healthier you will live. Let me ask you: When was the last time you felt really healthy? Energetic? Attractive? In charge of your mind and your mood?

One thing you can definitely control is the shape of your life. It's your choice. From what I've read and been told, the biggest influences on your health are diet, behavior, and environment. You can control your diet. You can control your behavior. And to a large extent, you can control your environment. But what about your genes? Isn't a lot of disease a result of what's been passed on to you by your parents? Not necessarily, say many health experts. Genes rarely cause disease; they just make us more susceptible to certain types. I've heard genetics described as a loaded gun; bad health choices simply pull the trigger. Your body is a self-healing, self-governing system that will maintain good health if you give it the right nutrients, the right amount of activity, the right emotional balance—in short, the right care. In other words, give your body a chance!

Maybe you've been telling yourself, "I've got to do something," but you don't know how to go about it. That's why I've created this easy-to-

follow six-step program. My former coach Mike Estep used to say, "Tennis is a lot like chess, but a lot of women are playing without a couple of pieces. Some of them can't hit an overhead or a topspin forehand. Martina happens to have all the pieces on the board."

Maybe you've been trying to get in shape, but until now, you haven't had all the pieces available to you. To shape your self, you must have all the pieces on the board—everything you need working in sync to tune up your body, mind, and spirit. These six steps are those pieces.

So what are they? The steps are based on strategies I've used over the years—a lifestyle I've designed for myself, based partly on good sense and largely on scientific soundness. It isn't a fad; it's a way of life. It was a long time coming, too. When I started out, for example, people used to think that steak and eggs was a good meal to eat before a match. Everyone was pretty clueless about nutrition and training back then. With all that I've learned about food, exercise, and health, I just wish I could have put these strategies to use much earlier in my career. But better late than never.

Here's an overview of Part 1—the six steps—and Part 2—the Shape Your Self nutrition and exercise plans.

## **PART 1: STEPS TO SHAPE YOUR SELF**

### **Step 1: Develop the Mentality of an Athlete**

When I was about 7, my father used to say, "Make believe you're at Wimbledon." So, in my mind's eye, I'd see myself standing at

Centre Court, holding up my trophy. He planted those kinds of dreams in me, and as I grew up, I began to dream on my own.

Those dreams gelled into what is called an athlete's mentality—an attitude, a mind-set, a singleness of purpose to become the best that you can. It's formed in your heart and mind, and it becomes part of who you are. More practically, it involves goal-setting and using logs or journals to monitor performance, provide feedback, and see if any patterns, good or bad, are emerging.

You don't have to be an athlete to develop an athlete's mentality. You can use the same techniques to develop a sense of discipline, focus, and purpose that will take you to the top in every part of your life. I'll show you those techniques in this step so you can build up your inner strength and good health.

## **Step 2: Build Your Support Team**

I believe in having a support system for whatever you do. It gives you the strength to keep going. I've always had a few of my friends and advisors sit together and cheer for me during a match, a coach or trainer who helped me play up to my potential, or a friend who might say, "Come on; snap out of it" when my moods are as overcast as a cloudy day. Companionship was something I got used to when I was 13, having teammates I played tennis with. I wasn't just out there for myself—and that was fun. The bond formed with teammates lasts a lifetime.

With the encouragement and support of others, your efforts will start to pick up immediately. When people are there for you, you

want to be with them. At the emotional level, there's a certain feeling of fulfillment that comes from being around people you like and who like you. They hold you together when you feel like you're falling apart. Even research shows that people with support systems are more likely to make healthier choices, experience less depression, and live longer.

Your support system can keep watch over you, too, to help you kick your bad habits and put some control in your life. I remember that back in the eighties, one of the habits I had gotten into was buying something for myself whenever I was feeling down—expensive toys like cars and jewelry. I'd go on these spending binges to compensate for losing.

At that time, basketball great Nancy Lieberman, who was playing with the Dallas Diamonds of the Women's Basketball League, was training me. Back then, she set me straight on my spending habits. "You've got it all wrong," she told me. "You don't buy something because you lost a tournament and you want to feel good about yourself. You buy something because you want it and you deserve it. You don't deserve something for losing. You have to earn it."

I came to realize that habitual spending could become as destructive as relying on drugs and alcohol, overeating, or starving yourself. We all have a negative escape hatch somewhere! Had it not been for Nancy lighting into me like that, it may have taken me a lot longer to get the wake-up call I needed.

So in this step, we'll talk about how you can build a positive network of people as well as what to do when relationships become coun-

terproductive. Unless your support system has a positive influence on you, it can be tough to reach the goals you set for yourself.

### **Step 3: Fuel Your Body and Mind**

Good nutrition is the foundation of performance in every area of an active, successful life. In this step, you'll learn how to introduce natural foods, including raw foods and juices, into your diet. Trust me, as soon as you try this way of eating, you'll be able to feel the difference it makes in your body. You'll feel so much lighter and so much stronger without a lot of unnatural substances in your body. You'll start feeling more vibrant. Your body will release toxins. You'll automatically lose weight if you need to. Your skin will look more youthful (an outward sign of inner rejuvenation). You'll experience boundless energy. And you'll think more clearly and creatively.

I attribute the ageless way I feel now to how I eat, and I see no reason why I won't feel this great well into my golden years. It has made that much of a difference. You'll be able to execute this food plan easily and even cheat on it occasionally. Yes, it's okay—indeed, it's healthy—to cheat every now and then. I don't believe in overdoing anything.

### **Step 4: Go Organic**

Today, we have access to a plethora of food sources: raw, canned, bottled, boxed, vacuum sealed, and even freeze dried. We have quantity, but quality is what we've sacrificed over the past 50 years, and as a result, life-threatening illnesses have surfaced with a vengeance and at a rate that is alarming.

In this step, I'll talk about how buying organic foods is one of the ways you can ensure the quality of the food you serve. Organic fruits, vegetables, and grains are grown without the use of most conventional pesticides and without fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients. Organic meats and dairy products are free of antibiotics and growth hormones.

Maybe you haven't gone organic yet because you think the food is too expensive. You're right; it can be. But I've found that shopping around pays off. Places like specialty stores, co-ops, gourmet delis, farmers' markets, and community-supported agricultural programs sell organic foods that are economically priced. The one thing I'm thankful for is that there are so many places where I can buy organic produce and other foods. Fortunately, with the growing demand, prices are coming down.

There are other ways to go organic, too, besides the food you eat. This is where I'll also talk about how to eliminate pollutants from your personal environment with organic alternatives and safer solutions. Did you know, for example, that you don't have to spray chemical pesticides in your house to kill bugs, that red chili powder can get rid of ants, or that chopped bay leaves and cucumber skins can repel other pests? There are so many positive benefits to your health that can be achieved by creating a less toxic environment for yourself, inside and out.

### **Step 5: Build the Fitness to Function**

I never did like conventional exercises—you know, like repetitive calisthenics. In grade school, I'd go to any length to avoid them. Can

you relate? But if exercise has a lot of mix-it-up variety in it (I have a short attention span), I'm game.

The techniques you'll learn in this step are fun, unique, and cutting edge. You can do these simple yet challenging workouts at home with just a few inexpensive and easy-to-store pieces of equipment. You don't even need a gym membership.

My exercises target body parts you want to overhaul. They focus on strength and cardio. They're designed to develop your energy system and rejuvenate your body. Whether you're a beginner at exercise or have some experience already, I will meet you where you are. I'll show you how to challenge yourself depending on your level of conditioning. I promise that this is one approach to exercise with which you will not get bored. I don't know about you, but I like to concentrate and think about what I'm doing when I work out. I want to be aware of my body and what it's trying to do, not just "get through it." So I'll guide you through some focusing techniques that will make you appreciate the power, strength, and beauty of your body and what it's capable of doing.

This kind of training, coupled with good nutrition, has helped me be in the best shape of my career. I know it has made me stronger than other women on the court and faster than most, but not bigger than a lot of them. In fact, the conditioning exercises will help you reshape areas of your body where you want better, or different, contours.

With the training I do, form follows function. In other words, I train specifically so that I can functionally improve my tennis. You can train

that way, too—for a specific sport—or you can train for a better look, such as a better-shaped butt, toned arms, a flatter belly, longer muscles, or all of the above. It's up to you, and my exercise guidelines give you the flexibility to meet your personal fitness goals. You'll look better, and you'll perform better in whatever you need to do. You'll feel healthy and be bursting with confidence. And that confidence will show.

### **Step 6: Recharge and Energize—When You're Tired of Being Tired**

When I was first inspired to write this book, I knew immediately that I wanted to do a chapter asking: Are you tired of being tired? I know I was! I've been in too many situations, on and off the court, in which I didn't have as much energy as I would have liked. If I feel wiped out when I'm playing or training, I could put stress on my body. I could hurt a knee or a shoulder or an ankle by falling, not to mention lose a match. When I'm exhausted, I don't have enough stamina to do a lot of the activities and sports I enjoy. I've always liked to test the limits of my body while it's still capable of pushing the limits. I want to know exactly where that limit is and keep pushing it. After all, the only way to not fail in anything is to do nothing.

Over the years, I've learned to listen to my body, paying attention to its cries for help, and let it dictate the right pace so I don't experience fatigue. Here's where I'll share with you my techniques for recharging. You'll find out how to be a better steward of your own energy system and how to boost your energy production to meet your body's demands.

## **PART 2: THE SHAPE YOUR SELF NUTRITION AND EXERCISE PLANS**

The second part of the book “puts it all together” for you. It introduces you to a healthy meal plan that will manage your nutrition for better health. This is based on the way I eat, and it has helped keep my body in peak condition and working well. If you follow the menus pretty closely, you should soon start looking and feeling better.

Next is a fitness section where you’ll learn dozens of fun exercises designed for different levels of fitness. These exercises are a part of my own routine. Until several years ago, I was never really aware that there are so many new exercises you can do to get fit. My trainers began to teach me new moves, and this new knowledge about exercising was challenging and exciting. It’s always fun for me to learn new ways to exercise. I like to move and I like to be challenged, and these exercises help me do that. Together, both of these sections offer you some great tools to get in shape and stay that way.

### **CHANGING THE SHAPE OF YOUR LIFE**

To attain the shape of your life, I believe you must be open to change—changing a habit, a pattern of behavior, an attitude, a way of living—but do it gradually. I think people can handle change better if it’s gradual and if they don’t have blind spots when it comes to what needs changing.

Studies have shown, however, that people are generally resistant to change. It makes them feel uncomfortable, out of sync. Bottom line:

Change frightens them. Most people like routine. How many times have you heard someone say, “I wish things could be the way they used to be” or “I like things just the way they are”?

Sometimes, though, we just have to pause and take inventory. If you honestly look over the areas of your life that call out for change, what concerns you the most about your lifestyle? Is it poor nutrition? Lack of exercise? Being tired all the time? Putting on weight because you’re eating poorly? Being too busy to enjoy life? Needing to carve out more time for rest and relaxation? Rearranging priorities? Retrospection, and introspection, are all about pausing and taking inventory of ourselves. Read through “Your Personal Health and Fitness Inventory” on page 10. It may alert you to factors in your life that are positively or negatively affecting your health. Simply circle yes or no for each question, then study what your answers mean.

### **TIME FOR A CHANGE**

Sure, change is difficult, but it allows us to be better than we were or ever knew we could be. It’s the gateway to personal growth and new experiences. Unless we change, we keep repeating the same mistakes. You know this yourself if you’ve ever lost weight and regained it, over and over again.

Many people don’t want to retool their lifestyles because their fear of failure is too great. Are you like that? You don’t even get going on a quest because you’re afraid you won’t make it? But if you’re afraid of something, you won’t change anything.

*(continued on page 13)*

## YOUR PERSONAL HEALTH AND FITNESS INVENTORY

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|---|--|--|
| 1. Do you try to eat at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables each day?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>                                   | 6. Do you drink at least 8 cups of pure water daily?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>   | 11. Do you exercise for 30 minutes or more at least three times a week?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>  |
| 2. Do you try to limit your consumption of red meat to a few times a month?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>                                   | 7. Do you try to limit your consumption of soft drinks, including diet sodas?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>                                    | 12. Do you regularly participate in stress-reducing activities, such as relaxation, meditation, reading, exercise, yoga, hobbies, or other fun activities?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b> |
| 3. Do you eat mostly natural carbohydrates, such as whole grains, instead of processed carbs, such as sweets?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b> | 8. Are you happy, or comfortable, with your present weight?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>  | 13. Do you get enough satisfying sleep most nights of the week?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>  |
| 4. Do you try to limit your intake of foods containing additives, preservatives, or artificial colors?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>        | 9. Do you limit your intake of alcoholic beverages to one or two drinks daily or have none at all?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>               | 14. Are you a nonsmoker, or if you used to smoke cigarettes, have you quit?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>  |
| 5. Do you ever buy organically grown foods?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>   | 10. Do you limit your intake of coffee and caffeine-containing beverages to 1 serving a day or have none at all?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b> | 15. Do you have a supportive network of friends and family to whom you are connected?<br><b>Yes</b> <b>No</b>  |

### What Your Responses May Mean

For every yes you circled, take credit for your healthy habits and congratulate yourself. You've already accomplished a lot more than you realize. Reflect on the things you're doing right and vow to continue them. The nos you circled simply mean you have work to do in some areas. We

all do. I remember when one of my coaches told me I could be the greatest female player ever, but I wasn't playing up to my potential. I was in good physical and emotional shape, but my strategic game left a lot to be desired. There's always room for improvement.

Here's a closer look at what your responses mean, question by question.

1. If you're eating fewer than 5 servings of these foods, you're skimping on a lot of healthy, anti-aging nutrients. Green

veggies, for example, are loaded with folate, a nutrient that reduces the risk of common aging-related diseases. Fresh produce is rich in antioxidants, which are thought to prevent harm to our cells caused by destructive chemicals called free radicals. For great health and rejuvenation, fruits and vegetables need to be the centerpiece of your diet.

2. Too much red meat in the diet can be hard on your body. It's high in saturated fat, which can contribute to blocked arteries, and a diet overloaded with red meat has been implicated in colon cancer. For a lot of people, it's hard to digest. The digestive system slows with age, so I think it's better to curb your intake of red meat, especially as you get older. If you enjoy eating it, just try to make it a treat by having it only a few times a month.
3. I hope you answered yes. If you did, you've said no to a group of foods—sugar and processed foods—that are rough on your metabolism. Eating these foods throws

your blood sugar out of whack, and you're apt to feel tired and hungry as a result of blood sugar levels going up and down. What's more, these foods have very little fiber, so they don't contribute much to the 20 to 35 grams that you need daily for good health. Whole grains give you plenty of fiber, plus B vitamins, which defend your heart and brain from age-related diseases.

4. Processed foods, as opposed to natural, whole foods, have a lot of stuff added to them—stuff that supplies very little, if any, nutrition. Additives, preservatives, and artificial colors in foods have been linked to allergies and disease, so it's best to choose additive-free, natural foods whenever you can.
5. Organic foods are those produced without pesticides, hormones, or antibiotics. These foods have been shown to be higher in nutrients and are a better all-around choice for ensuring the quality of your diet. Say yes to organic!
6. Drinking ample water throughout the day is a great habit if

you want to stay healthy and lean (water aids in metabolism) and feel youthful. Very often, feeling tired during the day is a sign that you're dehydrated.

7. Drinking sodas when you're thirsty can really rack up the calories and promote weight gain. Soft drinks are loaded with sugar—about 10 teaspoons per can—and are among the worst beverage choices. Even if you drink diet soda, your body gets confused by the artificial sweeteners in it, according to research. For some sugar-sensitive people, diet sodas may stimulate cravings for more sweets. They may also elevate blood sugar in the same way regular soda does. When your blood sugar goes up sharply, your body releases insulin, a hormone that tells your body to store calories as fat.
8. If you're not happy with your weight, maybe you're overweight and perhaps at risk of obesity. Being heavy is more than an appearance issue. Obesity puts you at risk for developing one or more serious medical conditions, which can cause poor health and prema-

(cont.)

## YOUR PERSONAL HEALTH AND FITNESS INVENTORY (CONT.)

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- ture death. In fact, obesity is associated with more than 30 medical conditions. Among the short list of obesity-related ills are heart disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and kidney disease. (A lot of people think they're fat even when their doctors tell them they're within a healthy weight range. If you fit that description, it may mean you have a body image problem that needs to be sorted out through counseling.)
9. Despite some of the health claims attributed to alcohol, it can be detrimental to your body. Excessive alcohol consumption promotes weight gain, dehydrates your body, can be addictive, contributes too much sugar and few nutrients, and can lead to organ damage. It's best to monitor your intake or switch to nonalcoholic drinks.
  10. Caffeine is a powerful stimulant found in coffee, tea, soft drinks, and many over-the-counter medicines. If you're having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, limit your intake to one or two cups of coffee in the morning or eliminate caffeine altogether. Anyone who has heart disease, an irregular heartbeat, or high blood pressure should avoid caffeine altogether, since it elevates stress hormones that can have harmful effects on the cardiovascular system. If you want to reduce your caffeine intake, switch to green tea. It's loaded with disease-fighting, anti-aging antioxidants.
  11. Exercising on a regular basis drastically cuts the risk of high blood pressure and stroke. It also helps you lose weight and maintain that weight loss. Regular exercise slows bone loss, eases anxiety and stress, boosts immunity, improves sleep, and lowers the risk of type 2 diabetes.
  12. Rest and relaxation will keep you young! Beyond its well-known connection to heart disease and high blood pressure, stress—even a little bit—can harm your concentration and memory. Stress-reducing activities like those listed in this question can clear your mind and ease your body.
  13. There's a reason it's called beauty sleep! Anti-aging hormones such as melatonin, human growth hormone, and testosterone are produced in greater amounts at night during sleep. When you don't get enough sleep, your body isn't able to make these hormones in the amounts it needs. Also, lack of sleep can cause the release of a stress hormone called cortisol, which, according to a lot of studies, is directly tied to weight gain. To feel and look your best, you need 7 to 9 hours of good sleep each night.
  14. I've read that quitting smoking can add nearly 9 years to your life span. I believe it. Smoking is estimated to cause one-third of all cancer deaths and one-fourth of fatal heart attacks in the United States. Approximately 440,000 Americans die each year from diseases related to smoking, according to the American Lung Association.
  15. Stay connected with friends and loved ones. A large number of studies suggests that continuing close relationships into old age has a positive impact on your health.
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Or maybe you're a born procrastinator. Okay, I'll admit it, so am I—or I was. Procrastination is an old habit that many times in my life kept winning out. I'd let problems slide and slide, mostly because I needed shelter from them when I was playing tennis. Conflict, for example—I tried to avoid it at all costs. I would just let things build, and they'd get worse. But just imagine what might happen if you let your health slide. Who wants to hear a doctor say, "If you don't stop smoking, you'll be dead in 6 months" or "If you don't stop drinking, your liver will give out in 2 years"? Don't let things deteriorate into a life-or-death situation. Please! I learned to deal with problems head on, and sooner rather than later. You can as well.

One important rule in this process is to make meaningful changes that you want for you, not for others. Changes made to please others are unrealistic, but more important, they're unfair to you.

You've heard the cliché about how a journey begins with a single step? The journey to shape your self unfolds incrementally. All I ask is that you take a single step, then another one, then another. Just put one foot in front of the other and don't worry about the length of the path. Once you get on that path, and the longer you stay on it, there eventually will come a time when you will not turn back. You'll be on the path to good health the rest of your life.

The key word is *gradual*. For years, a good friend of mine tried to quit smoking. She was never successful until she decided to take a gradual approach. She told herself, "I'm not going to smoke in the car." She stopped smoking in the car. Next, she said, "I'm not going to

smoke in the bedroom." She stopped smoking in the bedroom. Then she vowed, "I'm not going to smoke when I'm on the phone." That was a tough one for her. Whenever the phone rang, it was like a signal to smoke, and she lit up a cigarette without thinking. But she was able to stop her automatic behavior. At that point, she was down to about three cigarettes a day and ultimately was able to quit. You see, she gradually and systematically eliminated every habitual circumstance that caused her to light up.

You might do the same. Think long term and don't go for the quick fix. Just take it day by day. Perhaps start by giving yourself at least a half hour each day to take care of yourself in some way. Before you know it, you've lost 5 pounds or lowered your blood pressure or stopped drinking or smoking. You start feeling a difference. You start looking better, without expensive creams or makeovers. You turn heads, with people wondering why you look so great and how you did it. Your new, more vibrant health shines through from the inside, and that to me is exciting.

Something I read recently made a huge impression on me, and I want to share it with you before we move on. It is from a book titled *How to Think like Leonardo da Vinci* by Michael J. Gelb (Bantam Dell, 1998). In it, Gelb lists Leonardo's personal rules for staying healthy. Here are some of them.

- Beware of anger and avoid grievous moods.
- Rest your head and keep your mind cheerful.
- Be covered well at night.
- Exercise moderately.
- Shun wantonness and pay attention to diet.

- Eat only when you want and sup light.
- Let your wine be mixed with water, take a little at a time, not between meals and not on an empty stomach.
- Eat simple food.
- Chew well.
- Go to the toilet regularly!

Those are some simple yet very powerful thoughts from one of history's true Renaissance men, who, like many health advocates today, believed in a holistic philosophy of health and medicine. To me, Da Vinci had more talents and smarts than any human who ever lived. By following just a few principles of healthful living like those listed above, you can make some pretty dramatic improvements in your own well-being.

## THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

Let me emphasize that getting in shape is not about the pursuit of perfection. It's about the pursuit of excellence. You can be excellent without being perfect, and that's the key. Excellence doesn't involve trying to be the best; it means making your best effort in whatever you do.

Perfection is very elusive and really nonexistent. It can lead to disappointment. Trying to attain perfection, whether it's the perfect body or the perfect performance, can also wear you down physically and emotionally. That's because the stress and worry of trying to be perfect can actually decrease mood-lifting chemicals and deplete glucose levels in your

brain so you can't even think or act clearly.

We tennis players try so hard to play the perfect match, but we can always find something wrong with our game. It's like that in life, too. Making mistakes is normal. It's trying to correct them that really matters—staying in the solution. You have to acknowledge what you're doing wrong, then ask, "What do I need to do to correct it?" "What can I do better?" And then you figure it out and, hopefully, change it. That's an example of giving your best effort.

My childhood idol, Billie Jean King, planted some wise ideas in my head about the pursuit of excellence. When we worked together from 1989 to 1994, she encouraged me to be nicer to myself. I was so involved in being the best tennis player possible that I routinely gave myself a hard time whenever I fell short of my expectations. I'd kick myself for my mistakes and forget to take energy-boosting pleasure from what I did right. Billie Jean told me, "Sometimes you have to be satisfied. You try hard enough. Don't be so self-critical; don't be so hard on yourself."

So I took her advice to heart. I still set expectations for myself, but they involve doing my best rather than wanting to be the best. Sometimes I am still too hard on myself, but overall I am much better. These days, when reporters ask me how I will do in a certain tournament, I always tell them, "I have no expectations for doubles; I have no expectations for singles. The only expectation I ever have is to absolutely give my best effort, have a great time, enjoy myself, and hopefully put on a good show

for the fans so that they'll enjoy it." It's amazing how your game picks up in the long run when you let up on yourself and give yourself permission to be less than perfect.

I like to keep a healthy perspective. Though I have a certain knack for a few things in life (I am a very good sleeper, for example, and my fruit-consuming skills are superb), I still have a lot of work to do on a lot of things, including my tennis game.

Sure, there's nothing wrong with wanting to

build something special or extraordinary in any part of your life. The key, I think, is to strive to do things as well as you can rather than as perfectly as you can. If nothing else, you'll be rewarded with less stress. Whenever you notice that you're expecting too much of yourself, just tell yourself, "Let go of perfection." You'll feel calm, at peace, and more energized as you go after your goals.

So if you're ready to give your best effort, let's get started on the six steps to shape yourself. The journey begins on the next page.